

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0203

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: PQ REFERENDUM STRATEGY

1. THE PARTI QUEBECOIS MAY BE CONSIDERING A SERIES OF REFERENDA ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION, ACCORDING TO AN INTERNAL PQ DOCUMENT OBTAINED BY LE DEVOIR AND RADIO-CANADA. THE DOCUMENT, INTENDED AS A BRIEFING PAPER FOR PQ POLITICAL ORGANIZERS IN THE RIDING ASSOCIATIONS, SPECIFIES THAT THE PARTY'S PROMISE TO HOLD A REFERENDUM IS A STRATEGIC MOVE RATHER THAN A LEGAL OBLIGATION, THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT LIMITED TO ONE "ALL OR NOTHING" REFERENDUM, AND THAT "SUCCESSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE" REFERENDA MAY BE THE BEST STRATEGY.

2. THE PQ DOCUMENT, ENTITLED "QUEBECOIS, TOMORROW BELONGS TO US", STATES THAT: "NOTHING PREVENTS US FROM HAVING SEVERAL SUCCESSIVE REFERENDA. THESE CONSULTATIONS COULD REPEAT THE SAME QUESTION UNTIL WE OBTAIN A MAJORITY 'YES' VOTE. THEY COULD ALSO BEAR ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF PROBLEM: EG THE FIRST ONE COULD BE ON THE PRINCIPLE OF SOVEREIGNTY ITSELF, THEREBY CLARIFYING THE PRESENT SITUATION AND INITIATING THE PROCESS, AND A SECOND ONE COULD BE HELD

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ON THE FUTURE CONSTITUTION, AND EVENTUALLY A THIRD ONE ON THE ACCORDS WITH CANADA."

3. ACCORDING TO LE DEVOIR, THE DOCUMENT OUTLINES A SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION FORMULA WHICH LIMITS ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA TO ECONOMIC AREAS ONLY (NO MENTION IS MADE OF A COMMON DEFENSE FORCE, FOR EXAMPLE). WITHOUT MAKING ANY

ATTEMPT TO FURTHER DEFINE THE NATURE OF FUTURE ASSOCIATION, DOCUMENT STATES THAT THE PARTY WILL PROPOSE ONE OF FOUR TYPES OF ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA: FREE TRADE ZONE, CUSTOMS UNION, COMMON MARKET, OR MONETARY UNION.

4. COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST AUTHORITATIVE SUGGESTION THAT A SERIES OF "SUCCESSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE" REFERENDA MIGHT BE ENVISAGED. THE RENE LEVESQUE AND CLAUDE MORIN HAVE CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED THAT SOVEREIGNTY AND ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WOULD BE ACHIEVED SIMULTANEOUSLY, WITHOUT EVER SPECIFYING HOW THIS MIGHT BE DONE. THE PQ DOCUMENT, HOWEVER, PROPOSES THAT A REFERENDUM ON THE "PRINCIPLE OF SOVEREIGNTY" COULD PRECEDE A SEPARATE REFERENDUM ON ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA (THE ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION REFERENDUM WOULD IN FACT BE ONLY THE THIRD OF A SERIES). STUDIES BY POLLSTER MAURICE PINARD TEND TO CONFIRM THAT THE CHANCE OF A FAVORABLE REFERENDUM VOTE FOR SOVEREIGNTY WOULD BE REMOTE UNLESS THERE WAS CONVINCING ASSURANCE OF ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION. GOQ LEADERS SUCH AS RENE LEVESQUE AND CLAUDE MORIN ARE AWARE OF THIS ANALYSIS AND PROBABLY AGREE WITH ITS ACCURACY. THE FACT THAT THE PARTY HAS ISSUED A DOCUMENT SUGGESTING THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATING THESE TWO QUESTIONS, THEREFORE, SEEMS TO US YET ANOTHER INDICATION OF DISACCORD AND CONFUSION WITHIN THE PQ OVER THE BASIC QUESTION OF THE DEFINITION OF SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION. THE SUGGESTED SEPARATION OF THE TWO QUESTIONS ALSO CONFIRMS THE CONTINUED STRONG
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PRESENCE OF "UNCONDITIONAL SOVEREIGNTISTS" WITHIN THE PQ WHO HAVE NEVER FULLY ACCEPTED THE MORE LIMITED CONCEPT IMPLICIT IN THE SOVEREIGNTY ASSOCIATION FORMULATION FAVORED BY THE MORE MODERATE LEADERS.

5. THE PQ'S REFERENDUM DILEMMA UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEXT PROVINCIAL ELECTION. UNLESS THERE IS A CONSIDERABLE CHANGE IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE PQ COULD WIN, IN A REFERENDUM HELD WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS, A CLEAR MANDATE FOR SOVEREIGNTY. THE COURSES OF ACTION OPEN TO THE PQ THEREFORE, APPEAR TO BE LIMITED. THEY MIGHT POSE A DIRECT YES OR NO QUESTION ACCEPTING THE LONG ODDS AGAINST A FAVORABLE VOTE. SUCH A DEFEAT COULD FURTHER UNDERMINE SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY IN A SUBSEQUENT ELECTION AND EVEN THREATEN ITS COHESION. A SECOND OPTION MIGHT BE THE AVOIDANCE OF A REFERENDUM BY CALLING A GENERAL ELECTION. HOWEVER, UNLESS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HANDED THE PARTY A GOOD ISSUE UPON WHICH TO BASE SUCH AN ELECTION, MANY VOTERS ARE LIABLE TO TURN ON THE PQ REASONING THAT THE PARTY HAD FAILED TO HONOR ITS PROMISE TO HOLD A REFERENDUM DURING ITS FIRST TERM. A THIRD POSSIBLE OPTION IS TO HOLD THE REFERENDUM ON A PURPOSELY VAGUE QUESTION SUCH AS A REQUEST FOR A MANDATE TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS

FOR SOVEREIGNTY ASSOCIATION WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. SUCH
A FORMULATION HAS A FAIR CHANCE OF SUCCESS, PARTICULARLY FOLLOWING
OTTAWA'S ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO NEGOTIATE A CONSTITUTIONAL
REVISION FOR CANADA. HOWEVER, SUCH A VOTE HARDLY GIVES A MANDATE
TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP TOWARD THE ASSUMPTION OF SOVEREIGNTY.
THIS WOULD REQUIRE AT LEAST ANOTHER REFERENDUM VOTE TO
PROVIDE A MANDATE TO MOVE FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD TOWARD
POLITICAL SEPARATION. IT IS HARDLY LIKELY THAT THE PQ
WOULD RISK A SECOND MORE RISKY REFERENDUM WITHOUT ASSURING ITS
OWN REELECTION. THUS, QUEBEC'S FUTURE OVER THE MIDDLE TERM
IS MORE LIKELY TO BE DECIDED IN THE NEXT PROVINCIAL GENERAL
ELECTION THAN BY A REFERENDUM.MCNAMARA

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